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ABSTRACT

This review of educational information resources supported by the federal government, state and local taxes, and professional associations, provides a summary of the more active information centers along with the titles of some handbooks that can guide the user to additional resources. It also discusses who uses information and how, targeting of information to users, and the complexities of the dissemination process, and concludes with some thoughts for future directions in information resource management for the educational community. (RAA)

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EDUCATIONAL INFORMATION RESOURCES IN THE UNITED STATES

The State of the Art

by

Fred S. Rosenau

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"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Introduction

A very large number of people - millions, in fact - work in the field of education. Some have worked in this field all their working lives. Others have come to the field only recently and will move on to other careers.

They come from all sorts of backgrounds.

They work in a wide variety of locations.

Because of those two facts, and for some other reasons, they need different kinds of information to do their jobs well. Some educators find and use lots of information; others do not look very hard do not get helpful information when and where they need it.

But one point seems clear today: a lot of information has been collected for use by educators that is not being used very often or very well.

The Federal Government is a major source of the money and ideas that have built and now support most of the existing education resources. The money comes largely from two parts of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare -- the National Institute of Education and the U.S. Office of Education. But many of the ideas come from other fields - agriculture, marketing, communications, and so on.

The money makes it possible for many people to set up equipment and information files that are ready to give information to educators. These people work in many kinds of agencies -- nonprofit regional educational agencies, state departments of education, education service centers, specialized libraries, universities, business firms, and professional associations.

Very few people in the Federal Government or in the field of education know where all these information centers are located or whom they serve. In the next few pages you will find a brief summary of some of the more active resources, along with the titles of some handbooks that will allow you to find those that seem especially interesting.

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Information Resources of the Late 1970s

Educational information sources can be grouped in a number of different ways. Here you will find them under these headings, which are based on how they are supported:

(A) Sources the Federal Government Supports

(B) Sources Supported by State and Local Taxes

(C) Professional Associations.

Also, though all these sources do provide educational information, some of them put more emphasis on training teachers or on helping schools adopt new programs or on meeting new educational or social goals set by the Congress or by state legislatures. Still, each of them can and does provide information of various types to individuals and institutions in the educational field.

A. Sources the Federal Government Supports

Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

At 16 places in the U.S., educational information is collected, examined, organized, and then communicated on request to any educator or researcher who asks for it. These 16 centers from a network that puts together large reference books to help educators find the information they are looking for. They also publish individual lists of materials on various topics to help educators learn what is new and different in that particular area of interest. In many libraries educators can look through this collection of documents at no cost, or materials can be ordered from the centers at modest cost.

National Diffusion Network (NDN)

In each state a small staff of people give school districts in that state information about any of some 200 or more unusual programs that have been shown to be effective in helping children learn and in training teachers to do their jobs better. These people have information about each of the effective

programs that are located all around the country; they know what it will cost if a school district wishes to adopt each of them and they know how the interested districts can apply for funds to help them get a new program installed in their classrooms or in their teacher training plans. Meetings are often arranged in different parts of the country where teachers and school administrators can meet with the people who developed the effective programs and can ask questions about materials, training, testing, costs, and so on.

Regional Offices of Educational Programs

The Department of Health, Education and Welfare has divided the nation into 10 geographical regions, with headquarters in such cities as Boston, Chicago, Dallas, and San Franscisco. More than a dozen employees of the U.S. Office of Education work in each of those regional offices. They provide information and other services to colleges, state education agencies, school districts, and everyone interested in education in that particular region. When the Government issues new regulations for its educational efforts, these offices are responsible for informing people in the region about them.

Research and Development Exchange (RDx)

Seven nonprofit regional educational agencies and a university research center operate this network of information resources. Each "exchange" helps educators in its region (made up of three or more states) get the materials and ideas they need to improve schools and the training of educational personnel. They circulate information that the education agencies of the region ask for to meet state and local needs. A resource and referral service based at Ohio State University puts together and distributes a calendar showing all the education meetings scheduled in the months ahead. It also produces pocket-size lists of agencies and associations that can help educators with challenges they face - such as school violence and vandalism, metric education, parent education, energy needs, women's equity,

handicapped learners, child abuse, and so on. These lists are then distributed by the exchanges to various people in each of the states they serve.

Teachers' Centers Exchange

Hundreds of teachers' centers are now operating in urban, suburban, and rural areas. A small group of professional communicators at a regional educational agency keeps them in touch with one another so that they can help each other grow and prosper. This network is made up mainly of the staff of the centers themselves; the staff of the exchange acts as a group who can be reached by telephone for ideas as to which centers have which kinds of talent to help other centers. The exchange also publishes books and bulletins to help new centers get started and do better work with local teachers.

Women's Educational Equity

Various groups have different information responsibilities for this nationwide program. One major information center collects, examines, organizes, and provides, on request, informaiton about all parts of women's educational equity. A coordination group, at a different site, keeps information moving among the various women's groups that have received funds to develop materials or training in this field. Another group produces and sells the best materials produced by various educators in the field. Still another group offers information and training on how to develop proposals that may lead to money to support local activities.

Curriculum Centers for Vocational Education

At six regional locations educators can find, or ask for, information, teaching materials, training packages, and other help in vocational and technical education. Each state education agency has one person who links the schools and colleges in that state to the nearest curriculum center. Centers distribute such items as catalogs, brochures, and newsletters as well as curriculum materials.

Desegregation Assistance Centers

Each region of the nation has three centers that can provide information and other help to school districts that are actually trying to desegregate their schools. One center offers help with race desegregation; another takes care of national origin; and a third deals with sex equity. Each stores and circulates information to meet the special needs of educators in its own region.

Bilingual Education Centers

Three centers collect, reproduce, and distribute information, curriculum, and training materials needed by educators in their regions who are working in bilingual education. These centers pull together the materials developed at 14 special centers - for Spanish or Filipino or Portuguese or Chinese bilingual needs. And the also provide information on the work of 16 training resource centers that help school administrators and teachers and teacher trainers use materials and tests in bilingual education.

Regional Resource Centers in Special Education

These 13 centers meet the information needs of educators who work with handicapped children. They do their work by demonstrating effective ways of creating individual education programs for each handicapped child. Each center plans with each state in its region what type of information and/or training will be needed in that state.

State Information Capability

About two-thirds of the state education agencies have received awards that make it possible to build and operate a statewide education information program. The states develop plans, collect information, train their staffs, and provide information services to schools and colleges on request.

For further details, see Dissemination Networks: Information Resources for Education, available from Educational Resource Center, 855 Broadway, Boulder, Colorado 80302.

B. Sources Supported by State and Local Taxes

Each state education agency has on its own payroll a staff of professionals who work with school districts. They carry information of various types from the state agency to local school district offices and, in some cases, to school buildings in those districts. Some of them are subject specialists - persons with insights and experience in math or reading or science, for example. Others are legal experts or state fiscal officers. All can spread information among educators and can carry information from educators back to the state agency.

Spread around about half the states you can find more than 500 educational service centers, located in different geographic regions of these states. They are often located in county or regional office buildings. Some can provide extensive amounts of information, whereas others offer lesser amounts. In some cases these regional service centers own equipment and maintain staffs to given information to the entire state or to several counties or even to users outside the state.

Large-city school districts, where most of the nation's children to to school, have their own information resources. So do some of the wealthy suburban school districts. In addition, there are clusters of local school districts that work together - like the Council of Great City Schools or school study councils or networks of schools all across the nation that are using the same new program.

State departments of education have joined together to form the Council of Chief State School Officers. Regional service centers work cooperatively to share information within their respective states.

Also, a very few states have broken up their agencies and put some staff into regional state offices to bring their information services closer to the schools they intend to serve. In one state, for example, members of five service teams work directly with schools they are assigned to giving them information they would otherwise have to get from the state agency located much farther away.

Also, in each state agency you can find a number of state civil-service employees whose salaries are paid, fully or in part, by Federal money to serve as information resources in specific fields - such as adult basic education, basic skills, migrant education, and so on.

Each state agency has a public information director. This person, with staff help, provides information to the news media, to school administrators, to teacher and community organizations, to the legislature, to the state board of education, and to many other individuals and groups.

C. Professional Associations

Professional educators belong to many types of associations.

Teachers may be members of the National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers, or a local education group.

School administrators may belong to the American Association of School Administrators, the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the Associated Public School Systems, the Association of School Business Officials, or the state affiliates of any of those groups.

Policymakers may belong to the National School Boards Association, the National Association of State Boards of Education, the Education Commission of the States, etc.

Private school personnel may belong to the National Catholic Education Association, the National Association of Independent Schools, the Council for American Private Education, and various denominational groupings.

Researchers may belong to the American Educational Research Association, the American Society for Information Science, the American Psychological Association, the American Sociological Association, and so on.

Those whose work is concerned mainly with improving the skills and performance of teachers may belong to the National Staff Development Council and/or the National Council of States for Inservice Education, or may be part of the Teachers' Centers Exchange, or may share in the efforts of one of the Teacher Corps regional networks. They may also belong to the American Society for Training and Development.

Trainers of teachers who work in colleges and universities are likely to be involved in the programs of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, the American Council on Education, the National University Extension Association, and so on.

Others with special interests may share in the activities of the National Community Education Association, the Parent Teacher Association, the Public Education Association, the National School Volunteers Program, and other groups of this type.

Just about every one of these associations publishes a newsletter and a magazine or journal intended to spread educational information. Just about every one of them holds an annual meeting for its members, usually rotating the location from one section of the country to another to encourage wider participation and broader information sharing.

But the list of professional association does not end there.

The publishers of this country have an association. So do the college booksellers. So do the field representatives of the educational publishers in some of the larger states. They do a lot of sharing of educational information.

Librarians belong to national and regional and state associations - the American Library Association, the School Library Association, the Special Libraries Association.

There are temporary associations of those promoting a particular type of education; for example, in the 1970s, groups of professionals interested in experience-based career education joined forces to promote that new program.

There are special-interest groupings - like the Committee for Full Funding of Education, the Council for Educational Development and Research, and the National Home Study Council.

Finally, there are the subject-oriented associations - the International Reading Association, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the Speech Communication Association, and many more.

This list is not intended to be complete. For a fuller list, see Private Organizations and Associations (1978), Directory of Education Associations (1977), or Directory of Staff Development Programs and Resources in California (1978).

Who Uses Information and How

Many information resources, obviously, are in place, ready for use by educators. But the people who have the information continue to wonder why so few of those who work in classrooms and those who manage school buildings use the informatin that is just waiting for them. Lots of the information is free. Much of the rest is offered at very low cost.

One careful study of the market for education information, carried out in the mid-1970s, found that those who do use education information ranked their preferred sources in this order:

1. Face-to-face discussion or conferences with people in my own organization;
2. Notes and files in my own office;
3. Educational newsletters, bulletins, announcements;
4. Telephone calls to people in my own organization;
5. Educational journals;

6. Personal library;
7. Memos and correspondence;
8. Face-to-face discussion or conferences with people in other organizations;
9. Telephone calls to people in other organizations;
10. Library or resource center in my own organization;
11. Office, department, or organization files;
12. Conventions, professional association meetings;
13. Workshops, seminars, graduate courses;
14. Textbooks, reference books;
15. Curriculum materials;
16. Technical reports, Government publications;
17. Other libraries, resource centers, or information services; and,
18. Abstracts, indexes, bibliographies.

The same study asked educators and policy-makers to give the reasons they preferred various information sources. Here is that ranking:

1. Is likely to have the information I want;
2. Is near at hand or easily accessible;
3. Responds to my particular problem or question;
4. Is easy to use;
5. Is usually available when I need it;
6. Keeps me aware of new developments;
7. Is up to date;

8. Provides for new ideas or different viewpoints;
9. Is authoritative, accurate, reliable;
10. Leads me to other sources;
11. Provides opportunity for discussion or exchange of ideas;
12. Responds rapidly;
13. Is complete, comprehensive;
14. Is free or inexpensive; and,
15. Is objective, impartial.

Here are some of the major reasons educators gave for looking for information:

- To keep aware of new developments and activities;
- To find answers to specific questions;
- To find new sources to help to improve my work;
- To find fresh ways to solve problems; and,
- To find new programs, methods, materials, or products.

Other studies of information use suggest strongly that some areas of the country are rich in information useful to educators whereas other areas have too little. It appears, also, that those who work in rural areas cannot get information as easily as those who work in big metropolitan centers or near university campuses. Some educators use all the information they can obtain; others do not bother to seek information unless it is right at hand and comes from someone who is trusted.

Anthropologists can probably explain these differences. Gene Lisitzky, in Four Ways of Being Human, wrote about the Hopi as follows:

> "Before they will allow some big modern improvement to dig in among them, the whole village will carefully consider what will be its ultimate effect on the Hopi way of life. If there seems to be no real conflict, they will let it in. They do not like to experiment with such important matters, for they know that it is very difficult to get rid of a custom once it is firmly established in people's habits and people have come to depend on its benefits."

Teachers have their customs. So do administrators in local school buildings. Do you think they read Beyond the Stable State and Marketing for Nonprofit Organizations? Or do you think they read Reader's Digest and "Dear Abby"? Do you think they read The New York Times or the Town Crier? Do they curl up on weekends with books by Dan Fader and Herb Kohl, or were they among the hundreds of thousands who read Blackboard Jungle and Up the Down Staircase?

Sociologists have told you, time and again, about the social organization of schools and the social organization of college faculty members. Remember that the educational publishing industry uses different sales personnel and different strategies to market their publications to elementary and secondary schools and to teacher training institutions. Still other strategies are required if someone wishes to promote new ideas to preschool personnel, to teacher centers, to educational service agencies, and to educational research agencies.

The biggest group of possible users of educational information - classroom teachers - does not have easy access to a telephone in local school buildings. Most teachers do not have offices. Some teachers are obliged to share desk and closet space. For most, the opportunities to visit information centers are limited and depend heavily on personal initiative. Many elementary schools in this country still do not have libraries.

To improve student learning opportunities, teachers must have access to more and different information sources than those they presently rely on: text and reference books, personal notes and files, curriculum materials, and face-to-face communication with individuals in their own buildings. For the moment, they appear to make little use of the extensive education information resources that have been set up with their needs in mind.

Targeting Information

Some people feel that there is too much one-way communication in education - and in other fields. There seem to be more messages sent via mass media without letting those who receive the messages talk back. People are eager to tell others their opinions, but they are not always equally eager to hear the opinions of others. If millions of people get a message from one source, people seem to think that message is somehow "better" than one that reached only a few thousand people. At the same time people tend to seek out those whose opinions agree with their own.

Suppose an information center wants to provide information to a group of high schools. Perhaps the center has a special strength in one discipline, like psychology. Or one field, like education. Or one problem area, like sex equity. The messages it is ready to distribute will vary depending on how and why its staff has been compiling and organizing information.

This center needs to know a good deal about the audience to which it plans to send its messages or from which it expects to get requests for help. People who work in high schools are oriented toward subjects (like United States History) rather than to the full education of the youngster. People who work in high schools are organized into special departments (like social studies); units of credits from each department are needed for graduation. Most high schools are large and offer a number of complex programs, so teachers see students only briefly each day. Students in high schools, just like the Hopi Indians, live by customs that usually force them to conform to a culture established by others in the school. Much of what is taught in high schools does not fit the needs of many of the students who attend those schools.

People working in any educational resource center need to know this type of information about the educators they want to help. It simply is not enough to broadcast to the educational community as a whole the facts that an information center has been established and is ready to serve educators of all sorts. Instead, a careful plan must be prepared that spells out for the staff of the center what portion of the total audience it can best serve and what segments it is most likely to be able to reach effectively and efficiently.

In addition, those who have information to share and who want to build relations with a certain group of educators need to think about another challenge. Remember the story about the American business person who ran into a key business figure in Japan. The American asked what was the most important language to use in world trade. The Japanese answered: "My client's."

Do the Pieces Fit Together?

Think back to all those information resources described a few pages earlier. As you looked through the lists, did you wonder if each of the pieces of the information jig-saw puzzle could be fit together into a full-size picture?

You can turn to a new handbook called The State of the States (1979). In it you will get a little look at the way 38 states and territories would describe the information resources available to educators within their boundaries. You can also look at the new, revised edition of Databases and Clearinghouses (1979) and the publications mentioned on previous pages. And you can refer to the new sixth edition of the catalog called Educational Programs That Work (1979). You can even look backward to a somewhat out-of-date resource called Library Programs Worth Knowing About (1977).

None of these will give you the whole picture.

No one in the Federal Government or in a state Government has the whole picture conveniently at hand. The bits and pieces of these information resources are very hard to track down and very hard to keep up to date.

Take the picture you would find in one major bureau of the U.S. Office of Education. That bureau has about 20 different kinds of arrangements that can provide information and training for educators working in that special field. It has 16 centers for one group of clients - eight to serve single states and eight others to serve multiple states. It has 13 resource centers and 16 service centers. It has a major center to index and distribute information about materials. It has set up a group to arrange for marketing of its products. It supports a service that gives information to parents, publishes a

newsletter, and broadcasts mass-media messages. It maintains five parent information centers. It supports several groups that help with training and provide information about successful training practices. And lots more.

If educators phone or visit the center or group nearest to them, can they get information quickly and easily about all the other resources in that special field of education? Can they get directions on how to make use of other educational information sources outside that special field?

Recently, in an interview, a state superintendent of education was asked if the various information arrangements established with Federal money were meeting the needs in that state. In reply, the chief school official stated frankly that he would like to see the various services put together into a recognizable and usable whole picture so that the teachers and students in that state could benefit from the full Federal effort. For the time being, only certain groups of educators can get information from certain resource centers. Very few of the staff employed in centers are able to provide information from the other sources outside their special area of responsibility. Educators who happen to decide to use one information source very rarely are encouraged to learn about all the other resources that stand ready to meet their other needs and interests.

In a publication sponsored by the National Academy of Sciences (1978), Carol Weiss pointed out that spreading information "tends to be nobody's job ... Each group gets its reward in its own home base -- from colleagues and fellow professionals or from those who control career chances. Nobody has a stake in 'audience satisfaction'" - so the information offices often look empty.

But you can find information-rich people in some information centers. At one in Washington, D.C., you can meet a librarian who knows just about everyone in her field, belongs to the Special Libraries Association, makes phone calls until she gets the information you are seeking, and has the sort of restless curiosity that makes you come back again and again to ask her help. But even though she cannot fit all the pieces together on the spot, she really tries very hard and very successfully to meet the needs of those who turn to her for help.

What Can Be Done Now?

Those who understand and work with modern communications equipment know that today it would be possible to put certain types of equipment into grade-school libraries, if the people who work in those schools knew how to use that equipment and were comfortable with it. Right now those who work in local school buildings may not even know that this high-speed equipment is available or, if they do, they are awed by it. Even if a professional specialist were at their elbows, they might now know - for now - how to ask the right questions that would pull from the various information resources some ideas or materials they might use in classrooms the next morning. In any event, if change is to be brought about, experts who do not themselves work in those grade school must recognize how the teachers and principals who do work there think and feel and behave.

Everyone knows there is more information "out there" than anyone can see or hear or understand. But our capabilities for getting new information and making use of it are growing bit by bit. A major barrier to use of much of the new information is the "language" in which its has been transcribed. Perhaps this barrier can be overcome if teachers are invited to look at the ideas and materials that are being collected and to suggest ways to reshape them into forms that their fellow teachers could feel comfortable with and understand.

Another step forward would to be try to be more selective about what information is to be collected an stored in places where teachers (or school administrators) are most likely to want to find it. Are there a certain number of key resources, leading to larger information sources, that are clear, easy to use, and inexpensive enough to be widely distributed?

All sorts of newsletters and bulletins are sent out by information centers. Very few are well written. Very few contain interesting, lively articles. Very few are read carefully, if at all, by most teachers. Would not fewer and better publications of this sort help to increase the number of people using existing information resources?

No information center can reach everyone it intends to serve. Some teachers, some parents, some students, some principals, some central office staff, some college faculty can be reached. Through experimentation, it should be possible to decide - within budget limits - how many messages to send out if each center is to be working at its full capacity.

Existing information resources are used by some educators. No doubt more educators can be made aware of these resources. More can become occasional or regular users. But new equipment alone will not bring about that expansion of services.

David Seeley, Director of the Public Education Association, wrote these words in the New York Daily News on August 3, 1979:

> "The single most important need in public education today is to stop thinking of it as a "service delivery System." ... If all we want is educational services, we can have all we are willing to pay for. But if we want learning, then all the services in the world won't produce it, even if teachers use all their expertise to deliver it. The students are the ones who must do the learning, and the "service delivery" model draws our attention from this fundamental fact. It creates the impression, both for the teacher and for the student, that it is the teacher and the school system which produce the learning. ... Education is not a service; it is a relationship. It is a relationship between teachers and learners, and between schools and homes and communities. If the proper relationship does not exist, we do not have education. We might have "service delivery," and it might be absorbing substantial resources and energies, but it is not education. In many of our schools today, we do not have education; we have the provision of "educational services." ... But this attitude leads us to concentrate on improving the wrong things and wasting our efforts. We have been improving educational services to a fare-the-well; better buildings, more personnel, new textbooks,

> more support services, and a virtual cornucopia of new equipment. Yet we have not been improving learning relationships, and thus, despite all our efforts, and our doubling, tripling and quadrupling of education budgets, we have simply not improved education. ... There is another reason why it will be hard to shake our "service delivery" habits: too many people have a vested interest in them. The service-delivery concept facilitates bureaucratic empire-building and teacher control, while absolving parents and students of responsibility in the learning process. ... There are, of course, lots of things that need to be done in education; we must all work toward improved teacher training and selection, better curricula, better accountability, more parent support, improved counseling, better leadership, etc., etc. But none of these things will make much difference so long as teachers and supervisors think in terms of delivering services, and parents and students in terms of having services delivered to them. The wellsprings of initiative and motivation will continue to dry up; the crux of the matter--the relationship between learner and teacher, and between home and school, will continue to deteriorate. ... let's stop thinking and talking about education as a service that can be delivered and start focusing on the fact that the heart of education is human relationships."

The education information community must now get together and hammer out where it plans to go in the next few years. After there is agreement on what to do first, someone should write a concise and clear explanation that can be widely distributed to all those who want to pitch in and help make the plans become realities. But above all, information experts should not try to do <u>everything</u> for everyone. Instead, choose some directons you know you can persuade others to accept and then set to work, diligently and cooperatively, to make some genuine progress in the <u>few</u> areas you have chosen to concentrate on.